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AUTHOR McFerren, Margaret
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ABSTRACT

A survey of the status of language usage in Iran begins with an overview of the usage pattern of Persian, the official language spoken by just over half the population, and the competing languages of six ethnic and linguistic minorities: Azerbaijani, Kurdish, Arabic, Gilaki, Luri-Bakhtiari, and Mazandarani. The development of language policy through recent diverse governments is also chronicled. A matrix follows that rates these seven languages on: (1) their usage rating using State Department classifications; (2) increase and decrease trends by the year 2000; (3) chief of state use in addressing the populace; (4) use in armed forces, government, court, and diplomatic communications, written and oral; (5) use as a language of instruction or required language in higher education, on the secondary and elementary levels, and in adult education; (6) use in the popular press, radio and television broadcasting, and film; (7) business and professional use, written and oral; (8) use in intellectual circles; (9) the alphabet situation; (10) the status of indigenous literature; (11) use in public signs and notices; and (12) the availability of instructional materials and dictionaries in the native languages for use in English as a second language. Explanatory notes give the number and population percentages using the languages, the type of alphabet used, and specific instructional material titles. A selected bibliography is also included. (MSE)

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Language/Area Reference Center

COUNTRY STATUS REPORT:

IRAN

June 1984

Prepared by:

Margaret McFerren

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Iran - 1, Overview

The official language of Iran is Persian (Farsi), yet its power as a binding element in a fragmented society is being continually tested. The ascendancy of Persian--which is spoken as a native language by just over 50% of the population--is a relatively recent phenomenon, a product of the growth of mass media and a national education policy under the Shah. There are, however, significant ethnic and linguistic minorities in Iran whose languages--Azerbaijani, Kurdish, Arabic, Gilaki, Luri-Bakhtiari, and Mazandarani--are represented in the country status report. These languages are significant both for their large numbers of native speakers, and because they have been and continue to be the languages of dissent and opposition to Iran's central authority.

The Shah's way of dealing with ethnic differences in Iran was to deny their existence--everyone in Iran was to be Persian, by nature of the existence of a "Persian" nation state. This meant that only Persian could be used in the schools, in the press, in government, in films, etc. While the Constitution of the new Islamic Republic of Iran guarantees the teaching of literatures in the local languages, no ethnic languages are being used in school curricula. Local languages are guaranteed access to the press and other mass media, yet the right to print in local languages is being revoked when it is used, as it most often is, as a voice of opposition to Khomeini. Although the Constitution has made a place for the use of local languages in Iran, the central government, it appears, fears that free license to use and teach these languages will reactivate tribal separatism, and outside of the home and clandestine publications, they are not used at all.

The most substantive differences between language policy and language use under the Shah and since the 1978-79 Islamic Revolution are in the new status of Arabic and in the diminishing use of foreign languages in Iran. As the language of the Koran and of Islam, Arabic is now taught as a required subject in both primary and secondary schools. A prerequisite for entry into institutions of higher education is an examination to prove one's loyalty to Islam and to the revolution, for which a mastery of the Arabic of the Koran is a necessity. The Constitution stresses the importance of Arabic, not only as the language of the Koran, but also because it pervades Persian literature. Thus, although Persian is the one and only official language of Iran, Arabic has been accorded official approval.

Prior to the revolution, French, German, Russian, and especially English were very important languages in Iran. They were the media of instruction in certain schools on all levels, were heard on radio and television, used in textbooks and spoken among intellectuals. More important than suppressing local languages under Khomeini's administration has been the total eradication of the status of these foreign languages, a policy which has caused-at least in the case of English--business, medical schools, and professional transactions and proceedings to come to a standstill. Officials are presently looking the other way in the case of medical and technical training where textbooks are in English, as their manpower needs are so acute.

Overall, there is enough fear of appearing disloyal to the revolution, that individuals are staying as close to the letter of the law as is possible. This should result in the spread of Persian, the restriction of local languages to home and clandestine uses, and the near eradication of foreign language use.

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Iran - 2, Language Use Matrix

IRAN

Factoids	Persian(Farsi)	Arabic	Azerbaijani	Kurdish	Gilaki	Luri-Bakhtiari	Mazandarani
	Languages						
1. Usage rating*	1	2	3	3	4	4	4
2. Increase/decrease	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
3. Chief of State use?	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. Armed Forces/written	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Armed Forces/oral	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. Government/written	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Government/oral, national	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. Government/oral, local	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Court/written	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Court/oral	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. Diplomatic use?	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. Higher education,	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
13. Higher ed: required?	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
14. Secondary education	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
15. Secondary: required?	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
16. Primary education	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
17. Primary: required?	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
18. Adult education	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
19. Popular press use	1	3	3	4	?	?	?
20. Transmission across borders?	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
21. Use in radio broadcasting	2	2	2	2	2	0	2
22. Use in TV broadcasting	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
23. Use in film	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
24. Business/professional/written	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
25. Business/professional/oral	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
26. Use in intellectual circles	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
27. Alphabet situation*	1	1	1	1	?	?	?
28. Status of literature	1	0	?	2	?	?	?
29. Use in signs?	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
30. Teaching materials*	2	2	2	2	0	0	0
31. Bilingual dictionaries*	2	2	0	2	0	0	0

Notes:

Matrix figures are explained on following pages

? = information unavailable within time frame of project

- = not applicable

* = footnotes on following pages

FOOTNOTES

1. 1984 ESTIMATES, NUMBERS OF NATIVE SPEAKERS

Language	Number of native speakers	Percentage of Population
Persian (Farsi)	21,335,000	50.2%
Arabic	850,000	2.0%
Azerbaijani	8,755,000	20.6%
Kurdish	2,380,000 (6,800,000)*	5.6% (16%)*
Gilaki	2,592,500	6.1%
Luri-Bakhtiari	2,422,500	5.7%
Mazandarani	2,082,500	4.9%

* First number is the official estimate; in parentheses, the estimate of Gerard Chaliand (see bibliography) and others.

27. TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

Language	Alphabet
Persian (Farsi)	Arabic, with additional characters
Arabic	Arabic
Azerbaijani	Arabic
Kurdish	Arabic
Gilaki	not in written form
Luri-Bakhtiari	Arabic
Mazandarani	Arabic

30. TEACHING MATERIALS FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Persian (Farsi)	Bashiri, Iraj. Persian for Beginners. Minneapolis, MN: the author, 1972.
	Hillman, Michael C. Colloquial Persian. Austin, TX: Persepolis Enterprises, 1981.
Azerbaijani	Householder, Fred W., Jr. and Mansour Lotfi. Basic Course in Azerbaijani. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1965.
Kurdish	Abdulla, Jamal Jalal and Ernest N. McCarus. Kurdish Basic Course: Dialect of Suleimania, Iraq. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967.

Language	Texts
Arabic (Modern Standard)	Abboud, Peter F et al. Elementary Modern Standard Arabic, Parts I and II. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Department of Near Eastern and North African Studies, 1975-76.
	. Modern Standard Arabic; Intermediate Level: Parts I-III. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Department of Near Eastern and North African Studies, 1972.
	Azmi, Sanaa and Belkacem Baccouche. Conversations in Modern Standard Arabic. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984.

31. DICTIONARIES FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Persian (Farsi)	Aryanpur-Kashani A. and J. Saleh. The New Unabridged English-Persian Dictionary. Tehran: Amir-Kabir Publishing and Printing Institute, 1963-65.
	Wollaston, Arthur. An English-Persian Dictionary: compiled from original sources. 2nd ed. New Delhi, India: Cosmos Publications, 1978.
Kurdish	Wahby, Taufiq and C.J. Edmonds. A Kurdish-English Dictionary. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1966.
Arabic (Modern Standard)	al-Ba'albaki, Munir. Al-Mawrid. A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary, 16th ed. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-'Ilm lil Mabayin.
	Wehr, Hans. Arabic-English Dictionary. Edited by J. Milton Cowan. Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, 1977.
	al-Karmi, Hasan S. al-Manar; English-Arabic Dictionary. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1972.

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Lieberman, Samuel S. Prospects for Development and Economic Growth in Iran. New York: The Population Council, Center for Policy Studies Working Papers No. 41, May, 1979.

Morrison, G. (ed). History of Persian Literature from The Beginning of The Islamic Period to The Present Day. Leiden/Koln: E.J. Brill, 1981.

Naficy, Hamid. "Cinema as Political Instrument," in Michael E. Bonine and Nikki Keddie (eds). Continuity and Change in Modern Iran. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981.

Paper, Herbert H. and Mohammad Ali Jazayery. The Writing System of Modern Persian. Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1976.

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - a

1. Usage rating, using the State Department classifications
   1: Official language, most widely used.
   2: Official language, not most widely used.
   3: Widely used language, but not official. (Over 10% of population)
   4: Unofficial language used by significant minority (but less than 3)
   5: Unofficial language used by influential minority
   FOOTNOTE: NUMBERS OF SPEAKERS, PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

2. Increase/decrease trends by the year 2000
   1: Number of native speakers will increase in proportion
   2: Number of native speakers will remain proportionally constant
   3: Number of native speakers will decrease in proportion

3. Chief of State use, in addressing populace: YES (1) NO (0)

4. Armed Forces written communications
   1: Only language used in official communiques
   2: One of the languages used in official communiques
   0: Not used in official communiques

5. Armed Forces oral communications
   1: Used on all levels
   2: Used among officers only
   3: Used among multi-lingual NCO's and troops
   4: Used among monolingual troops only
   0: Not used

6. Written government communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used in official communications

7. Oral government communications/national level
   1: Official language spoken in national assembly
   2: One of the official languages spoken in national assembly
   0: Not used in government

8. Oral government communications/local level
   1: Official language in local government
   2: One of the official languages used in local government
   3: Allowed in local government proceedings, translated into official language
   0: Not used in local government

9. Court use in written communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - b

10. Court use in oral communications
    1: Only official language used in court
    2: One of the official languages used in court
    3: Allowed in courts, translated into official language(s)
    0: Not used in courts

11. Diplomatic use in notes to other countries: YES (1) NO (0)

12. Use in higher education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used

13. Language taught as subject in required courses in higher education:
    YES (1) NO (0)

14. Use in secondary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

15. Language taught as subject in required courses on secondary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

16. Use in primary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

17. Language taught as subject in required courses on primary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

18. Language use in adult education
    1: Used in oral and written technical instruction
    2: Used in oral and written life skills instruction
    3: Used in oral life skills instruction
    4: Used in literacy classes only
    0: Not used in adult informal education

19. Language use in popular press
    1: Used in publications throughout country
    2: Used in centrally-based publications with national distribution
    3: Used only in regional and local publications
    4: Used in clandestine publications only
    0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - c

20. Language used in radio/TV transmission across national borders?
YES (1) NO (0)

21. Language use in radio broadcasting
1: Language used broadcasting thoughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national broadcasts
3: Language used in local broadcasting only
3: Language used in clandestine broadcasting only
0: Language not used in radio broadcasting

22. Language use in TV broadcasting
1: Language used in telecasting throughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national telecasting
3: Language used regional and local telecasting only
0: Language not used in TV

23. Language use in film
1: Language used in indigenous film-making
2: Foreign-language films dubbed/subtitled into language
0: Language not used in films

24. Business/Professional use - written
1: Sole official language in business and professional communications
2: One of the official languages in business and professional communication
0: Not used

25. Business/Professional use - oral
1: Used in trade and commerce throughout country
2: Used in national trade and commerce only
3: Used only in local trade and commerce

26. Language use in intellectual circles
1: Language used in indigenous scholarly publications
2: Language used in formal scholarly discussion
0: Language not used

27. Alphabet situation
1: Established standardized alphabet exists.
2: Alphabet developed, no standardization
3: Competing alphabets exist
0: No alphabet exists
FOOTNOTE: TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

28. Status of indigenous literature
1: Established written tradition exists
2: Literature tradition emerging
3: Popular literature exists
0: No written literature exists

29. Language used in official public signs, notices: YES (1) NO (0)

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - d

30. Teaching materials for English speakers
    1: Wide range of teaching materials exists
    2: Narrow range of teaching materials exists
    0: No teaching materials exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

31. Dictionaries for English speakers
    1: Wide range of bilingual dictionaries exists
    2: Narrow range of dictionaries exists
    0: No dictionaries exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY